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**“From Slow Towns to Growth Towns: Place Representation in
a Global Market”**

Being a Report submitted to the faculty of The Built Environment as part of the requirements for the award
of the MSc Spatial Planning at University College London:

I declare that this Report is entirely my own work and that ideas, data and images, as well as direct
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Abstract (300 words)

Although normally confined to debates on cities, place imaging is becoming more prevalent in smaller towns across Europe as they try to compete, with limited resources, for mobile and human capital in the global market. This report explores this process by researching two such English towns that are employing polar approaches to achieve 'quality of life' for their towns. Ludlow employs a 'bottom up' approach to strengthen its local distinctiveness characterised by quality food, traditional heritage and 'slow living'. Northampton's approach is steered by an Urban Development Corporation's aspirations for the town to become a 'world class city'. In order to research these cases, discourse analyses and interviews with local leaders in each town are analysed and compared as well as contrasted. By asking the questions 'who decides' and 'who benefits' this research concludes that local decision-makers are failing to address concerns of local equitability in their quest to promote selective place imaging.

Part 1

Introduction

Currently in the field of planning, there is a debate about (re)constructing identities of local places in a global market. Identity is (re)constructed in order to attract mobile investment and human capital to one's city, town or region. At the local level, within a national, regional and sub regional context, the question of equity must be posed which asks: 'who decides the character of place representation and ultimately who benefits from these decisions'? This dissertation attempts to answer these questions by examining the local process in two English towns who have undertaken, what would seem to be, polar approaches to (re)constructing the town's images in order to promote prosperity. Ludlow, a small, relatively isolated, market town in South Shropshire, has taken a 'bottom-up' approach that aims to enhance the community's political, cultural and economic well-being. The hopes for achieving this rest with the recent membership of Ludlow into the Cittaslow network: an Italian-based worldwide network of 'slow towns' who promote 'counter-globalisation' living through numerous local initiatives. Northampton, a well linked, large town located halfway between London and Birmingham to the south and north, respectively, and halfway between Cambridge and Oxford to the east and west, respectively, has aspirations to become a 'world-class' city through the proliferation of housing growth and economic opportunity through business investment. These aims for Northampton are mostly set by the Central Government in the form of West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC) which has been imposed upon the town to see out these aspirations for growth and economic opportunity. Therefore a 'top-down' approach to Northampton becoming a 'world-class' city is currently being employed. These approaches are explored throughout this dissertation with the aid of understanding places through the lens of 'space of flows' and 'space of places'. In order to explore these global issues within local contexts, this research utilises in-person interviews and discourse analyses in Northampton and Ludlow.

This dissertation aims to accomplish the following:

- Place the research within the proper theoretical and policy framework of ‘glocalisation’, and place politics
- Explain the reasoning and process, behind Ludlow becoming a member of ‘Cittaslow’
- Explain the reasoning and process behind the formation of West Northamptonshire Development Corporation
- Draw conclusions as to ‘who decides’ and ‘who benefits’ in these two cases and relate these findings to the wider national and global context
- Understand the significance or insignificance of planning within these processes both theoretically and practically

Part II

Literature Review

There is an enormous volume of literature written on globalisation across the spectrum of disciplines due to its ability to create a paradigmatic umbrella over endless subjects in every location. Many prevailing assumptions about globalisation are taken for granted and are not examined much further. Therefore, in order to challenge some basic assumptions about globalisation and its relation to the local, a concise yet relatively comprehensive review of relevant literature is now discussed. This literature review begins by explaining, through conceptual macro arguments, globalisation in terms of scale and in terms of global-local interaction. Following this, the literature review moves progressively towards local place reaction to globalisation by looking at the issue in a European and English context. The final section considers local decision making through ‘popular planning’ and ‘leverage planning’. So a funnel method, if you will, is applied in this literature review whereby the literature reviewed at the beginning deals with globalisation in wider contextual terms then moves into literature concerned with the debate surrounding place reactions to globalisation and finally culminates with a look at literature relating to local place representation and concerns of equitability through the lens of ‘leverage’ and ‘popular’ planning.

1. Global – Local Relationships: A Macro View

Globalisation is often difficult to define or capture as it is such a blanket concept for explaining the current prevailing processes around the world fuelled by capitalism and technological advances, which have consequently brought about a widely held perception that the world is more fluid and places are becoming more alike than different. However, this notion is strongly rejected by many academics on the grounds that in terms of “development and inequality, the world is now more unequal than ever” (Murray 2006, p. 22). Much of this literature in this section has been drawn from

Murray's (2006) quite comprehensive work on understanding globalisation. Two useful ways to understand the global-local relationship is to frame it in terms of scale and interaction. In terms of scale, the local and global can be viewed, according to Herod (2003) by the influence of other geographers such as Neil Smith, through five metaphors: ladder, concentric circles, Russian dolls, earthworm burrows and tree roots (Fig. 1) (Murray 2006, p. 47). The 'ladder' metaphor represents a separated hierarchy with the global, on top, and local, at the bottom, and each are at polar rungs of the ladder (Murray, 2006, p. 47). Scale represented by the 'concentric circles' metaphor shows there is a difference between scales yet they are not hierarchical. A stronger relational metaphor between the global and local is communicated through the 'Russian dolls' since "the doll is not complete without fitting all the pieces together", however difference in scale between the local to global is communicated by the distinct size of each level's 'doll' (Murray 2006, p. 47). The 'earthworm burrows' and 'tree roots' metaphors "provide two radically different perspectives" since they "move us away from 'layered' and 'territorial' notions of scale and suggest the importance of networks" (Murray 2006, p. 47). These different concepts of scale help to illustrate the issue of defining global-local relationships since each of these concepts can be used simultaneously by actors all trying to accomplish certain objectives.

Following on from this idea of progression from territories to networks, or perhaps a breakdown of spatial barriers represented in the 'ladder' metaphor, this idea is illustrated by Crang (1999) not in terms of scale but in terms of interaction between the global and local. Crang categorises previous work on this topic into three frameworks. The 'world as a mosaic' (Fig. 2.2) emphasises local identity bound by geographical and cultural borders, where "intrusion is seen as a threat to authenticity and/or tradition...which tends to 'fossilize' difference and may be used as part of a defensive 'localism' and enables places to "be shaped in the image that the viewers desire" (Murray 2006, p. 50-51). Although this concept might seem irrelevant as Murray (2006, p. 51) suggests there are "no totally isolated places left", which is indeed true on a global scale, at the local level this control over shaping the image of places is very contemporary indeed, which will be discussed in the following section.

Pertaining to the 'world as a system' metaphor "it is argued that local outcomes are produced through the particular location of the place with the broader global system at that point in time" however, "systems approaches do not always suggest that the global conditions the local...it is the process of mutual differentiation which works both up and down the scale" (Murray 2006, p. 51). Murray (2006) warns of the danger of using the systems approach for cultural reasons as this has been applied before in order to explain why certain places are successful and others are not based on ethnicity of place. However, in terms of geography, the systems approach is useful in understanding the importance of place location within a wider system of economic integration, since such systems do exist.

Correlating more with the notion of the global-local scale as that of a tree and its roots is the concept of the 'world as a network' (Fig. 2.2). This concept "focuses on the connections between different people and institutions located on specific nodes across the world. "In this sense the local becomes the global and the global the local", which is otherwise known as 'glocalisation' (Murray 2006, p. 51). Murray (2006, p. 49) explains this networked space in terms of the global process: "...when we refer to the global process we are usually describing local-to-local flows that have become stretched across space to become global in extent". Is one to conclude from these metaphors that all places are 'glocal', since the 'mosaic' theory argues there are no totally isolated places left and since the 'network' theory argues that the local to local processes are global and should be considered 'glocal'? Gibson-Graham (2002) suggests this could be the case, but also suggests a number of other possibilities (Box 2.1) such as:

- The global and the local do not exist - they are just ways of 'framing' things
- The global and the local each get their meanings from what they are not; that is, in opposition to the other.

While there is no 'correct' representation or conceptualisation of these global processes, there is an element of truth within each of these presented which can be utilised when interpreting discourse and making sense of rather complex practical examples of local-global relationships, such as those presented later in this report.

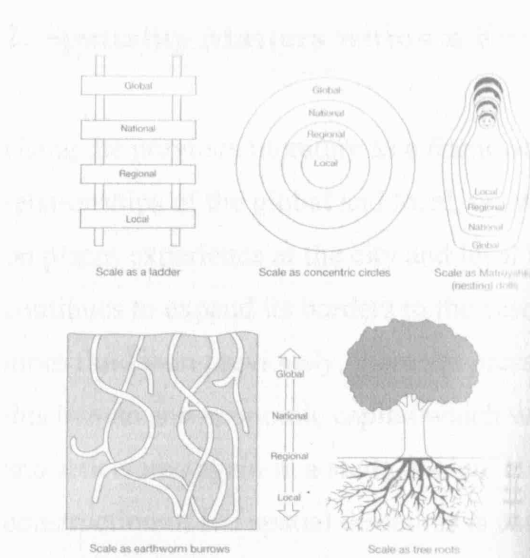


Figure 1.1. Global/Local Relationship as Scale, Murray (2006)
adapted from Herrod (2003)

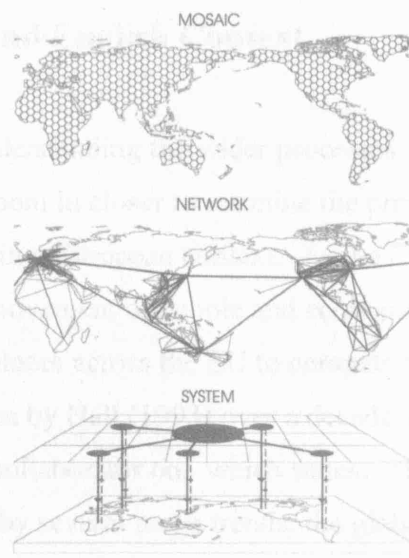


Figure 1.2 Global/Local Interaction Murray (2006)

Global and the local: six ways of conceptualizing interaction

Gibson-Graham (2002) goes further than Crang (1999) or Thrift (2000), arguing that there are in fact six ways that the global and local, and the interaction between them, have been conceptualized in geographic writings:

- 1 The global and the local do not exist – they are just ways of 'framing' things.
- 2 The global and the local each get their meanings from what they are not; that is, in opposition to the other.
- 3 The global and the local offer different points of view concerning social networks.
- 4 The global is the local – all global things have local expression. Multinational firms are actually multi-local.
- 5 The local is the global – the local is where global process interact with the surface of the Earth.
- 6 All spaces are glocal – the global is constituted by the local and vice versa.

Box 1.1 Global and Local: a complex relationship (Murray, 2006: 56)

separate locations are linked in a network, which is an interactive network that connects people and places. A different geographical context, they are not purely electronic networks – the electronic networks link up specific places – and it is this hybrid space that is the space of flows (Castells 2000, p. 594).

2. Spatiality Matters within a European and English Context

Using the previous literature as a framework for understanding the wider processes and relationships of the global and local, we will now zoom in closer to examine the pressures on places experience at the city and local level within a European context. As the EU continues to expand its borders to the east and the movement of people and economies is more fluid than previously, there are pressures for places across the EU to compete for this human and economic capital which was foreseen by Hall (1993) over a decade ago and articulated again in a study, which Hall was a collaborator on, which states: “The construction of EU spatial discourse is conditioned by several mega trends: the globalized market, the emergence of the competitive city, and the culture of mobility”(TCPA 2006, p. 25). There is concern among many academics and practitioners that challenges lie ahead in respect to “ensuring balanced development across disparate regions of Europe” whilst at the same time “competing in the global market” as a union of nation-states with a common market (Richardson & Jensen 2000, p. 505). As barriers are lifted however, ‘place’ and its spatial fix are becoming more, rather than less important in determining the success of localities:

In all this, despite the much vaunted ‘death of distance’, place continues to matter. England is not an even spatial surface: some places have economic advantages over others, while ‘spatial exclusion’ is increasingly recognised as key to understanding the patterns of inequality in England...the comparative advantage of regions and places is increasingly determined by placemarketing to attract skilled labour (TCPA 2006, p. 25).

Therefore, European cities are “framed within EU discourse as a node in an increasingly competition-oriented space economy”(Richardson & Jensen 2000, p. 505). This space economy referred to by Richardson and Jensen is commonly referred to by geographers as ‘space of flows’ and ‘space of places’ as developed first by Manuel Castells in his highly influential book *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996). Spaces of flows are where:

separate locations are linked up electronically in an interactive network that connects people and activities in different geographical contexts...they are not purely electronic networks...the electronic networks link up specific places, and it is this hybrid space that is the space of flows (Castells 2002, p. 554).

Spaces of flows are associated with post-Fordist global cities where there is high electronic and transportation connectivity. The space of places “organises experience and activity around the confines of locality” (Castells 2002, p. 554). Castells (2002, p. 554) stresses that “what is critical in our society is that cities are structured and restructured by the competing logics of the space of flows and the space of places”. It seems by these definitions used by Castells that the space of flows could be labelled as ‘global’ and the space of places could be regarded as ‘local’. If this is indeed the case, Castells is arguing here that the meshing of the global and local, through competition of logics, results in city structure. So how then does either the space of flows or space of places become represented in local places and is it apparent which of the two has a clear advantage? Should this representation be gauged in terms of policy decisions or material representation that reflects aspirations to create more spaces of flows than space of places or vice versa?

Perhaps this ‘battleground’ is being fought out within the rhetoric of ‘sustainability’ which Castells (2000, p. 118) states “implies the fight for control over space and the fight for control over time...so it is a defence of the place versus the flows where most dominant functions and power are organized”. Castells (2000, p. 118) goes on to argue that this battle is about the space of flows not “taking over the meaning, the function, the autonomy, ultimately the political capacity of decision making in the space of places”. However, Harvey (1996, p. 19) warns that this struggle for meaning and decision making is not purely altruistic on the part of those defending local culture:

This whole history of place building suggests that a cultural politics has just as frequently been at the root of the inspiration of place construction as has a simple desire for profit and speculative gain. Yet the intertwining of the two is omnipresent and, in some instances, the cultural politics seems more like a means to a political-economic end than an end in itself

Although there might be this ‘battle’ between the space of flow and the space of places, who decides how each should be represented or constructed? Whether one is referring to ‘place branding’, ‘place construction’ or ‘place marketing’, representation of place is a

common thread through each of these and is a critical concept for understanding competition between and within cities and towns.

Harvey (1996, p. 23) argues that there are tensions regarding representation of place not merely in terms of material but equally in the decision making of what is being represented: “struggles over representation are...as fiercely fought and as fundamental to the activities of place construction as bricks and mortar”. Place representation is not a place-bound isolated process but one where ‘the denigration of others’ places provides a way to assert the viability and incipient power of one’s own place” (Harvey 1996, p. 23). In other words, place definition and representation are as much a result of determining what a place is not as what a place is. This, according to Harvey (1996, p. 23), is done through the “fierce contest over images and counter-images of places” in an “arena in which the cultural politics of place, the political economy of their development and the accumulation of a sense of social power in place frequently fuse in indistinguishable ways”. Harvey hypothesises that through the processes of place representation, fantasy concerning real or imagined qualities of place becomes self-fulfilling prophecies particularly in cases of dubbing ‘other’ places in a negative light. On a more virtuous note, however, Harvey (1996, p. 23) asserts that:

a politics to place construction ranging dialectically across material, representational and symbolic activities...find their hallmark in the way in which individuals invest in places and thereby empower themselves collectively by virtue of that investment

Although it is certainly not a settled debate, there is a strong argument that globalisation breaks down national barriers and focuses more attention on the local level of government. There are many who would like to see a progressively strong move in this direction due to the supposed democratic legitimacy of local government. Castells (2000, p. 122) argues that:

Local governments, I think, are critical elements in re-establishing the legitimacy and efficiency of the democratic state...not that the nation state is going to disappear, not that the European Union’s going to disappear, but there has to be a shifting of the emphasis increasingly towards local government .

Building on this further Magnaghi (2000, p. 56) argues that the local was a “marginal issue for Fordist organizations” but now in the post-Fordist city the:

local is the real ground of conflict since the world market increasingly demands more and highly differentiated goods and consumption by developing local milieus, which in turn add quality and value to products (including the cities and regions) for competition on the global market

In order to compete on the global market and provide ‘highly differentiated’ goods, many towns and cities turn to their unique heritage to provide this. Harvey (1996, p. 12) warns that the:

effort to evoke a sense of place and of the past is now often deliberate and conscious” and that “authenticity, a modern value, stands to be subverted by the market provision of constructed authenticity, invented traditions and commercialized heritage culture.

As if there were a way to assess authenticity, Harvey then goes on to reference MacCannell (1976, p. 8) arguing that “the final victory of modernity is not the disappearance of the non-modern world but its artificial preservation and reconstruction”. Although showcasing local heritage can bring economic benefits to places, it can also be the catalyst of great conflict between “demands of residents vs. those of tourists, between the need to encourage new business and investment while maintaining the integrity of the historic core; and between different forms of development” (ARUP, 1995 in Strange, 1997, p. 228). Delving a bit further than simply a conflict between residents and tourists, although acknowledging this dynamic, Clark et al. (2000, p.1) argue “workers in the elite sectors of the post-industrial city make “quality of life” demands, and in their consumption practices can experience their own urban location *as if tourists*, emphasizing aesthetic concerns”. Therefore, in order to attract this ‘educated and mobile workforce’ to become permanent tourists if you will, cities oblige by creating themed experiences aimed at entertaining this elite group (Clark et al. 2000, p. 1). By creating themed experiences or as Graham & Healy (1999, p. 6) argue, promoting images that are only “partial perspectives” which “highlight (a) certain part of the urban story whilst inevitably neglecting others” establishes a “homogeneity of representation”; which they claim is an act of suppression.

3. ‘Top Down’ or ‘Bottom Up’: Local Strategies

The literature in the previous two sections covered a fair amount of ground concerning globalisation, glocalisation and addressed issues of representation at the local level. However little has spoken to planning directly thus far. In this final section of the literature review, two types of planning: ‘leverage planning’ and ‘popular planning’ are reviewed. Leverage planning is reviewed in order to shed light upon the research undertaken for this report in respect to the WNDC, which, it is hypothesised, employs this type of planning to foster its growth agenda. Likewise, Ludlow in partnership with Cittaslow, it is hypothesized, utilizes popular planning to facilitate its self-sustainable conservation approach to local development.

In order to give better definition to the ‘top-down’ approach mentioned above, ‘leverage planning’ is one of the six typologies used by Brindley, Rydin & Stoker (1996) to frame different types of planning. Leverage planning’s “essential ingredient” is “the use of public sector finance to stimulate a weak market and to release a greater volume of private-sector investment” (Brindley et al 1996, p. 20). Additionally:

the approach carries with it a strong implied criticism of the past record of local authorities in dealing with problems in these areas. Instead, emphasis is laid on the potential of the private sector to solve the problems, if only they had more confidence in the area. Considerable effort and money is therefore expended on boosting such confidence and improving the area’s image (Brindley et al, 1996: 21).

The authors use the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC), the first and much contested UDC in the late 1980s in East London, as the “prime example” of this “highly interventionist” type of planning.

The second typology, which could be viewed as a polar approach to leverage planning, explained here is ‘popular planning’. Popular planning is defined by the now defunct Greater London Council as:

planning from below – planning that is based on people coming together in their workplace and community organisations to formulate their own demands and visions for the future. Popular planning starts with resistance...The second stage

is the formulation of alternatives and the fight to put them into practice. (Bridley et al 1996, p. 18).

This is the type of planning, it is hypothesised, that Ludlow is employing through its work with Cittalsow. This will be fully examined in the following sections.

Part III

Methodology

In order to test the questions posed in the literature review, a robust qualitative research methodology was employed using two case studies, interviews and discourse analyses. Within each of these techniques is a separate methodology which will be explained in the proceeding paragraphs. As far as planned or logical sequence of these employed methods is concerned, there was a coherent attempt to conduct a policy and geographical review first, followed by interviews and then finally a discourse analysis. However due to uncontrollable factors such as the availability of interviewees and policy documents, this was not, although desirable, always achievable.

4. Case Studies

Ludlow is the base for Cittaslow UK as well as the first and largest of the three Cittaslow UK member towns presently. Naturally Ludlow was the preferred UK town to understand Cittaslow within a particular local context. Italian towns who are members of Cittaslow were also considered as possible locations for research; however it was acknowledged early on that a language barrier on the researcher's behalf would prove to be difficult in terms of personal communications as well as popular press and policy documents. Therefore it was determined this research would be confined to the UK.

The author's interest in undertaking this specific topic of globalisation and the local arose out of an initial interest in the Cittaslow network, which will be explained in the 'key findings' section, as a type of strategy that was capitalising on place distinctiveness through 'bottom up' means. Through talks with instructors at the University it became apparent that a profile of Cittaslow would be inadequate in capturing the complex issues Cittaslow was responding to. Therefore a second organisation, WNDC was chosen in order to compare and contrast place responses to globalisation since through initial basic research it appeared WNDC was more concerned with turning Northampton and surrounds into an economic generator and housing provider for South East England than capitalising on or enhancing its place characteristics.

It is recognised that these two towns are not only dissimilar in their approaches to competition, but also in their physical size and population with Northampton being significantly larger than Ludlow. However, these factors, although highly significant, are not the main concentration of this research; political tensions and place competition at the local level are. Intentionally these two cases were chosen since they represent a wider range of city/town types currently present throughout Europe, which do not neatly fit into 'metropolis', 'village' or 'periphery'. Ludlow along with Cittaslow and Northampton and WNDC are not heavily researched normally, so this fact provided the author with readily available individuals willing to talk about issues facing their towns and organisations, which was useful indeed.

5. Interviews

In total, five face-to-face interviews of approximately one hour each, were conducted in Ludlow and Northampton and were recorded through a digital Dictaphone with the consent of the interviewees and then written in the form of transcriptions. All of the interviewees' names have been changed, in order to protect their identities, which is in line with the guidelines of UCL's Research Ethics Committee. Structured questions were asked in all the interviews, however the author found that interviews took on their own direction and some of the most insightful responses were through questions not pertaining to anything in particular such as "do you have anything you would like to add?".

In the case of Ludlow, a request for interviews was sent out to a publicly available email address by the author. This request was forwarded to Ludlow members of Cittaslow and the author received three responses agreeing to be interviewed. These three individuals were all members of Cittaslow Ludlow, although representing different interests. Mr. Smith works for the South Shropshire District Council with expertise in conservation and building, Mr. Ford is a local volunteer involved with several initiatives however is most involved with environmental issues and Mr. Jones is a non-elected official of the Ludlow Town Council. Interview questions for Ludlow representatives were formulated after reviewing Cittaslow's website, local policy documents and popular press. These

questions (Appendix A) were aimed at drawing out tensions and conclusions concerned with:

- Joining the Cittaslow network
- The local in relation to the global
- Decision-making process within Cittaslow: ‘who decides’
- Who’s benefiting locally from Cittaslow

In addition, the author sat in on a Cittaslow meeting held at The Buttercross (Town Hall) in Ludlow.

For Northampton, the author requested interview through an email to WNDC and was successful in being granted one interview with Mr. Berry of WNDC. The second interview conducted in Northampton was with Mr. Murray, a local academic with several years of experience in working with UDCs in London and who worked as a public employee in Northampton. Questions for the interview with Mr. Berry (Appendix B) were formulated to address issues of equitability and sustainability relating to WNDC’s ‘interventionist’ nature in Northampton. Mr. Murray’s interview questions were more concerned with WNDC’s relationship with Northampton as a whole from perhaps a more objective view of someone not actually working for the organisation in question.

Principally, the questions asked in Northampton are concerned with understanding:

- Why WNDC was created and whether it was necessary
- What are the ‘discourse coalitions’
- What conflicts or tensions are a result of their creation
- Whether WNDC is promoting a ‘global’ strategy for Northampton
- Decision making process: ‘who decides’
- Who is benefiting locally from Central Government’s intervention in attempting to catalyse growth in Northampton and its surrounds

6. Discourse Analysis

A discourse analysis is a way of interpreting conversation that's written or spoken. This 'way' or method is not always clear according to Lees (2002), due to urban political geographers' lack of agreement in terms of theoretical assumptions. However, Lees does argue there are two distinct strands of discourse analysis. The first, which "descends from the long Marxist tradition of political economy and ideology critique", which "is a tool for uncovering certain hegemonic ways of thinking and talking about how things should be done that serve certain vested interests" (Lees 2004, p. 102). Lees also states that "recent work in this tradition has emphasized the role of 'discourse coalitions' in urban politics and policy" which "takes for granted the identity of the actors in question and theorizes the way coalitions form not in terms of the shared material interests" but "through discourse and persuasion (Lees 2004, p. 103). She goes on to explain further how coalitions are formed:

The focus is on groups coming together because they subscribe to the same terms. So, for example, a term like 'diversity' might serve as a powerful discursive glue because it is a term that everybody can rally around, even if when pressed it turns out that different groups understand 'diversity' in very different ways.

The second strand is "part of a process through which things and identities get constructed" and is less concerned than the first strand with "who said what to whom, where, when and how" since "power is all-encompassing and that the linguistic structures of discourse precede and help to construct agents as such" (Lees 2004, p. 103).

This report employs the 'first strand' of analysis since the research is structured in a way that does emphasize, 'discourse coalitions', and that there are indeed vested interests that need to be uncovered in both of these cases. In addition, the significance of 'who said what' is also recognized in this research, however the 'to whom, where, when and how' are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

In order to unpack these discourses, this section of the research analyses the interviews explained in the previous section as well as local policies and publications by organisations and the popular press. Practically speaking, these sources were scanned and interpreted by the author within the terms and theories discussed in the literature review. The keywords and theories either stated or implied by literature and interviews, scanned for are:

- Global – Local Conflict
- What keywords are the ‘discourse coalitions’ forming around?
- Space of Flows v. Space of Places
- Competition
- Who Decides?
- Who Benefits?
- Leverage Planning (Top Down) v. Popular Planning (Bottom-Up)
- Policy v. Material Representation

Part IV

Key Findings

7. Ludlow & Cittaslow

a. Overview of Ludlow

Ludlow is located in Shropshire County, England, in the Welsh Marches on the England-Wales borderlands (Map 9.1). Forty-five miles to Ludlow's east is the West Midlands conurbation of two and a quarter million residents (Office for National Statistics: Census 2001) which includes Birmingham and Wolverhampton (Map 9.2). Ludlow is a historic market town of approximately 10,000 residents (Office for National Statistics: Census 2001). Politically, the town is governed by Ludlow Town Council and a local Mayor. South Shropshire District Council is responsible for planning decisions within the town and its surrounds. Regionally speaking, Ludlow is a part of the Government Office of the West Midlands. According to Mr. Ford Ludlow is:

geographically remote, it's not near any motorway system; it's on a rail line which is north-south virtually impossible to go east-west. So it's quite isolated. So it's not going to attract big inward investment, you're not going to get a big company moving into Ludlow, so it's very low - key but that's not to say we can't be successful.



Map 7.1 Ludlow's Location within UK Context

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ludlow>



Map 7.2 Ludlow: just west of the West Midlands Conurbation

<http://www.multimap.com>

b. Overview of Cittaslow

As Ludlow is in a relatively geographically remote location, agriculture has traditionally been the staple economy for the town and its surrounding areas. However, Ludlow has managed to create significant added-value to its local produce in the form of a number of high quality restaurants, earning the town a reputation for culinary and gastronomic

quality. Having this informal distinction, eventually led to Ludlow's involvement in the Slow Food movement: an international organisation founded in 1986, "whose aim is to protect the pleasures of the table from the homogenization of modern fast food and life"(www.slowfood.com). The organisation has eighty-thousand members in over 100 countries where there are eight-hundred convivia, with nearly half of these members and convivia in Italy; where the origins of Slow Food began with the majority of the rest located in towns and cities in Germany, Switzerland, the USA, France, Japan, and Great Britain (www.slowfood.com). A convivia is Slow Food represented at the local level and is "coordinated by leaders, periodically organize courses, tastings, dinners and food and wine tourism, as well as promoting campaigns launched by the international association at a local level" (www.slowfood.com). "Local rootedness and decentralization are the most authentic characteristics of the movement, and the network of contacts it has built over the years represents without doubt its most valuable asset" (www.slowfood.com).

Ludlow is the headquarters for Slow Food UK. With this same ethos, in 1999 Slow Food decided to extend its influence into policies in towns and cities in Italy who were interested in preserving local traditions and promoting themselves as 'Slow Towns' or 'Slow Cities' and "avoiding the 'sameness' that afflicts too many towns in the modern world" through working towards "a set of goals that aim to improve quality of life" based on sustainability principles (www.cittaslow.org.uk). These goals that 'slow towns' work towards are under six key themes: environment, infrastructure, urban fabric, local produce and products, hospitality and awareness of the Cittaslow programme (DMA, 2005: Appendix 4 page 2). In order to become a member of Cittaslow, a town or city must be have under fifty-thousand residents and already have a Slow Food convivia and meet at least thirty percent of the sixty criteria under the key themes listed above. In addition, the locality must pay a nominal fee to join. In return the locality is authorised, and required, to use the Cittaslow logo (Fig. 9a) on promotional material, letterheads etc. Currently there are seventy 'slow towns' in Italy and nine outside Italy in the U.K., Norway, Germany and Spain. Ludlow is the headquarters for Cittaslow U.K.



Figure 7.1. Cittaslow UK logo www.cittaslow.org.uk/

Cittaslow network and its parent organisation Slow Food seem to be operating under the assumption that homogenisation is the result of globalisation and that towns should act to ‘avoid the sameness’ that is found in too many towns. In terms of a conceptual approach to the global-local relationship, it appears that Cittaslow network would like to see a return to the ‘world as a mosaic’ whereby a location’s identity is “bound by geographical and cultural borders”, and “intrusion is seen as a threat to authenticity and/or tradition...which tends to ‘fossilize’ difference and may be used as part of a defensive localism” and enables places to “be shaped in the image that the viewers desire” (Murray 2006, p. 50-51). This mindset seems also to be accompanied by the ‘world as a network’ concept, since these ‘slow towns’ are not simply cut-off from the rest of the world, but are linked through communication to other like-minded towns throughout Europe. Indeed, this appears to be a shaping of place image that attempts to reinforce the ‘local’ through capitalising on traditions and cultures specific to place but through selective networking strategy on a global scale.

c. Ludlow & Cittaslow: A Marriage Created Out of Crisis

Apart from the fact that Ludlow was already immersed in the Slow Food programme and joining the Cittaslow being a natural progression in 2003, what was the crisis or issues Ludlow was responding to by joining this network of towns with a heritage-based ‘counter-globalisation’ ethos?

A crisis and opportunity for Ludlow has been its impressive built environment which consists of a large stock of Medieval building and over five-hundred listed buildings “which survived virtually untouched from the 19th Century” (Mr. Smith). However,

many of these buildings were in poor condition and needed investment, but in order to “generate the investment needed for the upkeep of the buildings” there was a need to attract a lot of people in who were looking for a different lifestyle away from the sort of transient pace of 21st Century living” and Ludlow embodied a lot of what was considered to be old England and a lifestyle which people tend to look back on with fondness, to a degree with rose tinted spectacles, but it was an asset for us (Mr. Smith).

Not only were they successful in attracting this investment through these ‘lifestyle seekers’, who picked up the restoration tab on the built heritage, these newcomers had more to offer since:

often they had come from fairly active and influential jobs, so they were able to engage in community life, help us access funding from Central Government sources, and they created a lot of employment and the local residents were able to use that investment to secure their own employment and circulated in the local economy (Mr. Smith).



Photograph 7.1 An example of Ludlow’s Built Heritage. Photo Taken by Author 29/6/06

These well-off individuals pumping resources into Ludlow are described by Clark et al. (2000, p. 1) as “workers in the elite sectors of the post-industrial city” who “make ‘quality of life’ demands, and in their consumption practices can experience their own

urban location *as if tourists*, emphasizing aesthetic concerns”. In a sense this influx of people have enabled Ludlow to be “shaped in the image that the viewers desire” (Murray 2006, p. 51). This dynamic of attracting mobile and human capital, raises questions of equitability in regards to local residents which is addressed in the ‘who benefits’ section.

As mentioned earlier on, food, agriculture, small independent businesses and the tourists they bring are the staple of Ludlow’s economy and central to its culture and traditions.

When a Tesco supermarket was proposed in Ludlow’s town centre on the site of the former cattle market, it brought a number of locals together in defence of the ‘local’. Mr. Ford explains this:

certainly the threat of a major supermarket moving into the area – Tesco’s – rather concentrated the mind, at that time there were six independent butchers three or four independent bakers...the retail sector in Ludlow is made up of small family owned individual businesses and there weren’t many High Street names common elsewhere, and that focused the mind – did the local people know we have six independent butchers no they didn’t...and the city got around to actually saying oh six, let’s start to use them. So it’s the food dimension that triggered Cittaslow, that’s some of the reasons it was formed.

The supermarket was eventually granted planning permission, still with much opposition from local groups, but only after submitting a building design that was sensitive to the “town’s sense of place and the surrounding countryside” with its curved roof “which echoes the undulating hills which frame the town” (CABE). This altered design which is apparently sensitive to the town’s ‘sense of place’ is an example of the global adapting to the local in terms of appearance which results in a material representation of the ‘glocal’. Or to use Castells’s concept, the ‘space of flows’ has been modified to blend with the ‘space of place’ which although representing a small ‘win’ for the ‘local’ it was also a prelude to the power the ‘local’ was up against. It seems this event galvanized the local people into action in respect to defending their town from more of, what was perceived as an “intrusion...seen as a threat to authenticity and/or tradition” (Murray 2006, p. 51). In order to establish more autonomy over local decision-making however, would take stronger collaboration between local groups. This leads us to the question of ‘who decides?’ which forms the next part of this section.



Picture 7.2. A space of flows (Tesco Supermarket) implanted in a space of place (Ludlow's historic centre): a catalyst for defending the local. Photo taken by author 29/6/06

d. Who decides?

Prior to signing up with Cittaslow along with its goals being embedded into the town council, communication between different individuals and organisations involved with governing Ludlow was poor. In fact Ludlow Town Council, just eighteen months before town council elections in May 2003, was “in a state of crisis” that “narrowly avoided being taken into administration” (Cittaslow 2006). The 2003 elections saw a new ‘refreshed’ group in the council which agreed to take Cittaslow onboard and decided to embed it into the Town Council by making it a sub-committee. This sub-committee is “not confined to councillors, which has led to new ways of working and to new participation in local democracy” (Cittaslow 2006). Cittaslow originated in Italy where there is very different style of government structure which has historically been regionally based with a strong mayoral system, so Cittaslow in the U.K. is an adapted version due to the U.K.’s weak mayoral system and arguably strong central powers. Mr.

Ford explains this by stating that the mayor of an Italian town “enjoys a sort of benign dictatorship and a substantially greater budget to play around with than here. Here we have a three or four tier structure: Central Govt. County Council, District Council and Town Council”.

The Cittaslow sub-committee is virtually open to any group or organisation that would like to be a part of it, or any individual who cares to join its meetings. Participation in the Cittaslow sub-committee is from “quite a cross section of groups including people from the local Civic Trust, youth organisations, it’s very informal, technically it’s part of the Town Council but there are people from the civic trust, youth orgs, it comes and goes as initiatives rise and fall” (Mr. Ford). In contrast to this, Mr. Smith explains the previous democratic structure in Ludlow and that which is present in many towns:

in many towns you’re in a situation where many of the key decisions are made by bodies and organisations outside your home area. I think having that local control is a contributory to making Cittaslow work. You can put proposals forward and you don’t have to go through layers and layers of bureaucracy to make them work. What you need is a town where people can engage in government and decision and feel that it makes a difference. Um and at the moment in Ludlow we’ve got that, in other areas where they’ve suffered for one reason or another, than it’s harder to achieve the Cittaslow ethos.

According to Mr. Ford, Cittaslow has been able to accomplish this engagement by focusing around a word: ‘eco-governance’, which he claims would “take an hour to unpack, but it actually means listening to people, and it’s not necessarily because another authority says ‘well I’m sorry but you have to do this, don’t take no for an answer and just question things’”. Indeed ‘eco-governance’, although not referred to as such by any other interviewees apart from Mr. Ford, was a central theme they all subscribed to, including the quote by Mr. Smith above. ‘Eco-governance’, to these individuals in Ludlow seems to stand for autonomy from bureaucracy at higher levels of government, and empowering individuals and groups at the ‘grassroots’ level to make decision how they best see fit.

An example of 'eco-governance' or the 'Cittaslow ethos' in action is a contentious traffic management issue in the centre of town concerning a proposal by the County Council to close a historic gateway, that had been ongoing for nearly twenty years. Mr. Jones claims that by "setting up a committee with the Cittaslow model and involving all sorts of different people" they were able to "crack it" within eighteen months. This committee was composed of representatives from across the board including residents, councillors, traffic wardens and police. This committee was set up as a 'revolt' by the community which was "fed up of having schemes imposed on the community with little meaningful consultation" (Mr. Smith). Typical community consultation by the County in the past consisted of "two men in suits on a Saturday afternoon talking to people and that's it, consultation over, job done, that's what we're going to do to you in six months" (Mr. Jones). In order to turn the situation on its head, the local committee sent an invite to the County and relevant agencies inviting them to attend a public meeting. At this meeting "the public were really venting their fury and anger with passion" which:

made the people making the decisions sit up and realise that they could no longer carry on without carrying the community with them. The community had made a statement by saying look we want to be part of this process because this is what affects our daily lives,

Since this meeting, Mr. Jones claims that local people and agencies have had extremely "productive dialogue", and that "the District and County Councils now work with and for Ludlow rather than doing things to Ludlow".

This conflict between Ludlow residents and the higher level authorities is illustrative of Castells's (2000, p. 118) 'battle' about the space of flows not "taking over the meaning, the function, the autonomy, ultimately the political capacity of decision making in the space of places". Indeed it does appear that Ludlow has been able to gain, through conflict and dialogue, some autonomy and increase its political capacity in terms of deciding how its space of places are represented.

Undoubtedly the resolve to accomplish this reversal of power is, in part, due to the concept of 'eco-governance' that different groups and individuals at the local level were

able to focus around. Although Ludlow and Cittaslow together have achieved much there is evidence that the “Cittaslow ethos” is not shared by everyone in Ludlow, since many residents “still don’t really know what Cittaslow is or what it’s all about” (Mr. Jones). When questioned whether there was any resistance to Cittaslow being introduced to Ludlow, Mr. Ford replied there was not resistance since “I don’t think they had any say in it anyway”. This issue of inclusiveness is addressed in the following section.

e. Who benefits?

Whilst the Cittaslow U.K. logo claims that its towns are “Where Quality of Life is Important” (Fig. 9a), one must ask the question: ‘for whom’? Ludlow is promoting itself as a ‘quality’ place with fine restaurants and an impressive history with the built heritage to prove it. However, there are many questions concerning equity in the town raised by reviewed literature as well through interviews with local people. In Ludlow’s Strategic Action Plan (2004, Annex 6, p.3) it states that “While Ludlow is not ‘two towns’ there is a divide between affluent incomers and less well-off locals, and addition effort to ensure social inclusion is required”.

Indeed this bifurcation of communities between ‘affluent incomers’ and ‘less well-off locals’ is the downside of the inward investment of the town’s built heritage and political empowerment which is making Ludlow such an attractive hence unaffordable place to live. The CMA study (2006) on Cittaslow also points out the lack of social goals set out in Cittaslow’s six themed sections and that more of these indicators need to be in place to ensure equality. This dynamic is acknowledged by two of the interviewees. Mr. Ford questions who Cittaslow is benefiting:

how many people would that benefit? It’s just a small minority of well to do people who are comfortably well off probably retired and probably have a reasonable income, whereas probably a lot of people in Ludlow that’s third generation on unemployment, never mind the reasons for that, and we’re just not touching them.

And Mr. Smith acknowledges the danger of Cittaslow branding as an 'elitist' movement:

What we have to do and make sure we do is make sure it's relevant and not just seen as some kind of elitist rebranding of speciality foods and products and opportunities don't exist across the board.

When questioned how he planned to deal with these pressures, commonly referred to as 'gentrification', on the local people Mr. Jones acknowledged they need to do a better job of communicating Cittaslow to the local people, however he stated that:

affordable houses for local people on local wages is a real difficulty, there's not much the town council can do, because we aren't a housing authority, we have no statutory involvement or budget we're not big enough to start doing housing.

This response is in stark contrast to the 'eco-governance' ethos Cittaslow has espoused on other matters, perhaps this is beyond their remit since 'less well-off locals' do not match the desired image Ludlow hopes to convey. Mr. Jones instead speaks of the benefits that the rise of housing costs has brought to the locals builders since they have learned restoration skills that the town is now 'exporting' to other areas of the country.

He explains:

If you go and hang around, and I don't, the petrol station at 7 o'clock in the morning, you'll see vanloads of hairy ass builders tanking up and they're going to drive down to Monmouth, Ross-on-Wye or Chester because we're exporting these skills, bringing money into the area from skills we've learned effectively from rising house prices, so it's not all bad.

Obviously this development of skills that are exportable can be seen as a positive result of Cittaslow. Whether there are enough of these jobs to 'trickle down' through the community and the policy to ensure affordable housing for all, is an entirely different matter.

It was hypothesised early on in this report that Ludlow, with the aid of Cittaslow was employing a 'bottom-up' or 'popular planning' approach to competing as a town in a global market. As demonstrated in the previous sections, there is much to suggest that this is indeed the case. This is evidenced through the galvanisation of the community over the prospect of a supermarket's presence in the town centre, which led to a more organised effort to claim control over the decision-making process in respect to the

closing of one of the gates to the old town which had previously been controlled by the County Council. Although just examples, these stories are symbolic of the struggle between local needs and desires versus the dominant, perceived or real, powers of global capital and hierarchical government.

8. Northampton and WNDC

a. Overview of Northampton and WNDC

Northampton, like Ludlow, is a market town; however it is significantly larger with a population of approximately 200,000 people. Geographically, Northampton, located in West Northamptonshire, is midway between the two dynamic corridors of London-Birmingham and Oxford-Cambridge other wise known as the ‘Oxford2Cambridge arc’ (Map 10a). Northampton and its surrounds are “well placed in a national spatial sense, to build its economic prosperity” (ODPM 2005: 16). In addition, Northampton is well linked with excellent access to the M1 motorway and a rail station that has regular services into London and Birmingham both within an hour.

Northampton Borough Council (NBC) is the local decision-making body for the Borough, and is within the regional jurisdictional boundaries of the Government Office for the East Midlands. In the Milton Keynes & South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy (2003), Northampton has been designated as one of the key areas for housing, transportation, employment and economic growth with a new housing allocation of 30,000 homes (Map 10b.) to be built from 2001 to 2021 (MKSM, 2005: 16). This housing is needed in order to keep up with the demand for housing in the South East of England which is becoming exacerbated. Apart from housing and sustainability, Northampton also needs to perform “much better economically than it is at the moment” since it’s “not doing as well as other places in the South East, taking into account its proximity to London” (Mr. Berry).

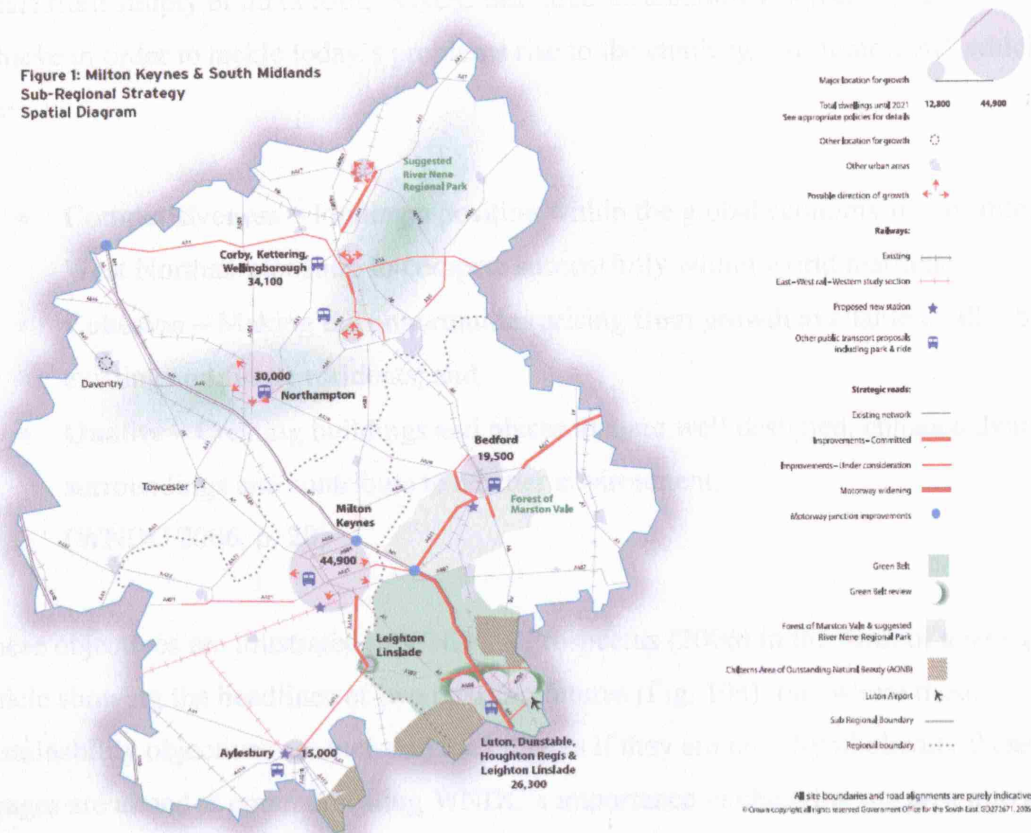
In order to ensure this growth occurs and is done in a timely matter in Northampton, and the two other West Northamptonshire towns: Daventry and Towcester, (Map 10c.)

Central Government has setup an Urban Development Corporation (UDC) in West Northamptonshire, the currently the only UDC outside the Thames Gateway. The UDC, West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC) has numerous tools at its disposal in order to see out this growth along with £25 million in its first two years: 2006 – 2007 (WNDC, 2006).

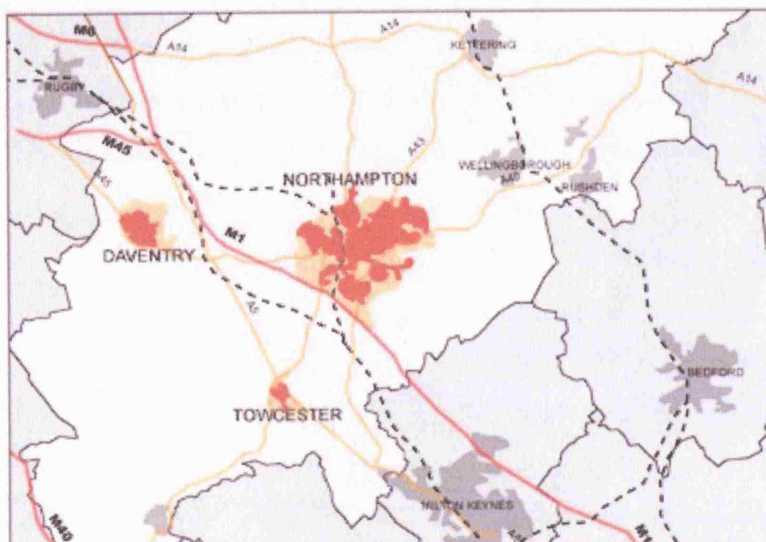


Map 8.1. Northampton: well placed at the heart of two key corridors

Figure 1: Milton Keynes & South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy Spatial Diagram



Map 8.2 Milton Keynes South Midlands Sub-Regional Strategy: Key Diagram
<http://www.goem.gov.uk/goem/docs/191913/237644/mksm.pdf>



Map 8.3 WEDC's Geographic Jurisdiction <http://www.wedc.co.uk>

Apart from simply build houses, WNDC has three sustainability objectives it “must achieve in order to tackle today’s problems rise to the challenges of tomorrow” which are:

- **Competitiveness** – Finding a position within the global economy that enables West Northamptonshire to compete successfully within world markets;
- **Cohesion** – Making the opportunities arising from growth available to all – both existing and future residents; and
- **Quality** – Creating buildings and places that are well designed, enhance their surroundings and contribute to a better environment.

(WNDC 2006, p. 20)

These objectives are illustrated in WNDC’s Prospectus (2006) in the form of a newspaper article showing the headlines of two possible futures (Fig. 10a): one where these sustainability objectives are met, and the other as if they are not. Symbolically these images are aimed at communicating WNDC’s importance in changing the area into a better place to live. However, these are extremely ambitious goals for Northampton, which as Mr. Murray states is “not feeling very confident as a town and it needs to rebuild that confidence, and the growth agenda is an opportunity to revitalise the town”.



Figure 8.1 Which Future? (WNDC Prospectus, 2006)

b. Who Decides?

Who then, will make the decisions that will help take advantage of the growth agenda and revitalise Northampton? Plan-making powers have still been retained by NBC as have development control powers that do not fall under WNDC's jurisdiction, which leaves mostly conservation area applications. WNDC has powers to make decisions on 'strategic' planning applications along with a host of other tools in to "generally do anything necessary or expedient to secure regeneration, or for purposes incidental to the need to secure regeneration" within the confines of its jurisdiction (WNDC, 2006: 15). In previous UDCs, plan-making has been part of the remit, which enables UDCs to move quickly. However, with WNDC, they have to wait for local governments to produce their local plans.

Currently, the Northampton Borough Council has begun writing their new Local Development Framework (LDF) which should be completed in two years minimum. Mr. Berry of WNDC explains that the plan-making powers that NBC has retained are an issue for WNDC since “there isn’t a planning context for us to show the delivery of our targets, one way we could address that is to start writing our own masterplans, effectively becoming the defacto plan making authority for our areas”. Mr. Berry then eludes to the fact that there will be ‘parliamentary or ministerial answers’ that will give weight to these type of plans, essentially overriding any local plans. Mr. Murray is adamant that waiting for the local plan in this context is “misguided” since speaking as a planner, “a lot of planning is bullshit, a lot of planning is never delivered, a lot of planning isn’t well thought out, so I’m sceptical, I’m very very sceptical”. Mr. Murray’s scepticism is based on the fear that Northampton might miss its window of opportunity and they should

get off their asses and do something with some sense of impatience and urgency otherwise they might miss it, maybe the money will run out, WNDC might lose support of government, maybe the market will start to go somewhere else, they’ve got to move a bit more quickly than they are. It’s a very slow town Northampton.

There does not appear to be any ‘discourse coalitions’ forming around any particular terms between WNDC and local groups and organisations. However, there appears to be an attempt to create a discourse coalition around ‘sustainability’ and ‘economic competitiveness’ since this is a term most groups can sign up to, regardless of the uncertainty of its meaning. WNDC uses both terms extensively in its prospectus and the interviewee representing WNDC was very keen on casting Northampton in a different light than it has been previously. Mr. Berry states:

whether they’ve committed Northampton to becoming a world-class place trying to compete with cities across Europe um and across the globe, I don’t know if Northampton has ever been talked about in those terms before. Our prospectus sets out ten key challenges for the area which hopefully raised the game in terms of sustainability and economic competitiveness in a way that hadn’t really been done before.

But Mr. Berry makes it quite clear that any form of ‘sustainable communities’ will not be coming from them, due to their remit to deliver housing:

we can’t spend five years consulting on how people want to see this town develop sustainably, but that’s on one hand, on the other hand I think we recognize that

only the town and the town's people can deliver sustainable communities, it can't really be imposed by a government quango that we are.

Perhaps there is a 'discourse coalition' waiting to emerge in Northampton, or rather there is just an overriding amount of apathy in regard to politics and planning in the town. Mr. Murray explains that Northampton isn't "creating any political ripples...there's very little noise from the communities, it's as if politics is either pretty dead in Northampton or it doesn't focus on the growth agenda". Further qualifying this, Mr. Berry is yet to identify community involvement: "across the town I haven't noticed or heard of great people's involvement in the planning process or in sustainability issues more generally". As a result of this lack of vision for the town and unengaged public, it seems that decision-making in Northampton, as it is currently stands, is going to remain stagnant, or handed down from the top. Mr. Murray explains further: "You can't just expect change in a town, its got to be driven or it's got to come burning out of the grass roots, and as we said it's not burning out of the grass roots".

c. Who Benefits?

It seems a rather moot point to understand who is benefiting from WNDC's investments into the area when the decision-making process, as described above, is in such a state. Perhaps though, this is where the problem lies. With the decisions being hashed out between agencies and governmental bodies over how to compete in the global market, the end users of this production of housing and economic opportunity are being overlooked. Unless, as Mr. Murray claims, there is "some connection made in policy terms in financial investment, to the more deprived communities there are underlying possibilities of parallel development". By 'parallel development', he is referring to the same type of bifurcated development happening in Ludlow. WNDC's remit is to build houses and report these figures back to The Treasury to ensure South East England builds enough houses to keep up with demand, delivering 'sustainable communities' will need to be developed through other means.

It was hypothesised earlier in the report that Northampton was employing a 'top down' or 'leverage planning' approach as a town competing in a global market. This is difficult to

confirm since the decision-making and planning process in Northampton is severely convoluted. What is clear is the lack of community involvement or grassroots democracy in Northampton, or any such movement that could make stronger demands in favour of Northampton's 'space of places'. Indeed the 'space of flows' in Northampton have, to borrow from Castells (2000), taken "over the meaning, function, the autonomy, ultimately the political capacity of decision making in the 'space of places' (118).

Part V

Conclusion

This research has attempted to examine two contrasting types of planning in order to determine the decision-making process as well as the beneficiaries in each case. Both planning processes seem to be responding to a lack of planning that takes the end user into consideration. The 'planning system' has been portrayed by most the individuals interviewed, as an impediment to local innovation and too slow to respond to the global market needs. In this sense, it seems there have been two responses. In Ludlow the response was from the 'bottom-up' whereby local residents and leaders formed a coalition to regain their autonomy in local decision making by opposing planning schemes and developments that they did not represent their 'place'. However, in Northampton, there has been little resistance or interest in local planning, especially from the 'bottom' which has opened the town up to 'intervention' from the Central Government who is able to use the town to its national advantage and interests which are currently creating a stronger economy and more housing. In both of these cases, there has actually been very little material representation of these power struggles, instead these plans are represented in policies and organisational formation. How these towns will play out in the future and how the 'winners' of these struggles will be represented materially is uncertain, although judging by the research findings Ludlow will be represented more by 'space of places' and Northampton by 'space of flows'. However, in both towns, there will for certain be 'losers' in the place imaging game where those who do not match the image are socially excluded from participating.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ludlow Interview Questions

Appendix B: Northampton Interviews

Abstract

Although normally confined to debates on cities, place imaging is becoming more prevalent in smaller towns across Europe as they try to compete, with limited resources, for mobile and human capital in the global market. This report explores this process by researching two such English towns that are employing polar approaches to achieve 'quality of life' for their towns. Ludlow employs a 'bottom up' approach to strengthen its local distinctiveness characterised by quality food, traditional heritage and 'slow living'. Northampton's approach is steered by an Urban Development Corporation's aspirations for the town to become a 'world class city'. In order to research these cases, discourse analyses and interviews with local leaders in each town are analysed and compared as well as contrasted. By asking the questions 'who decides' and 'who benefits' this research concludes that local decision-makers are failing to address concerns of local equitability in their quest to promote selective place imaging.